MEMOIR OF GOV. JOHN BROOKS.

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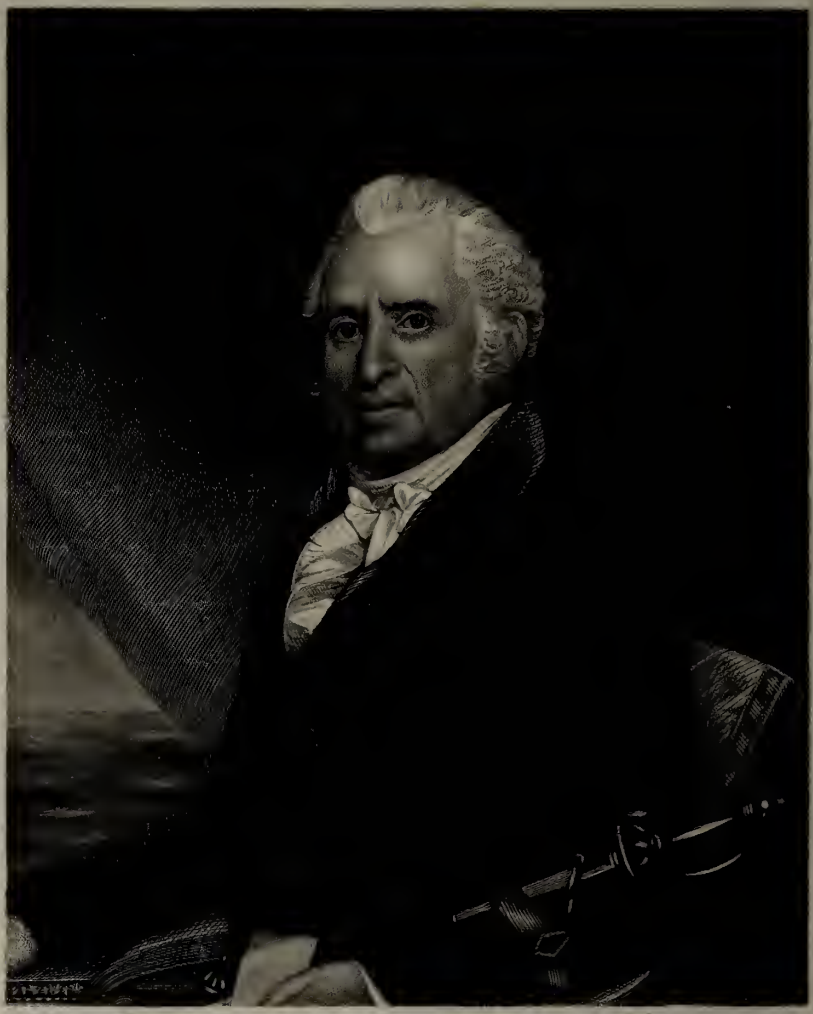

J. Brooks.

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MEMOIR OF JOHN BROOKS, GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF MASSACHUSETTS.

Communicated by Rev. Charles Brooks, A.M., of Medford, Mass., to the *New England Historical and Genealogical Register.* N ou 1865

John Brooks was born in Medford, Massachusetts, and was baptized May 31, 1752. His father, Caleb Brooks, and his mother, Ruth Albree, were born in Medford, and died there; both possessing good health, strong minds and Christian characters. The tragic history of his grandfather John Albree, who was born on the island of New-Providence in 1688, and was brought to Boston in 1700, is recorded in the History of Medford. Mrs. Brooks early discovered in her son John the signal traits, which herald distinction; and her bright genius and loving heart were not long in devising the means of developing his abilities. He was initiated into Latin and Greek; and at the age of fourteen Dr. Simon Tufts (H. C. 1767) received him into his family as a student; and the learning and discipline of the teacher, together with the sound good sense of the pupil, supplied the deficiencies of a collegiate education. He early showed a taste for military affairs; and was chosen captain of the "boy's company" he raised. His royal love of command secured to him great influence, and Dr. Tufts's grounds were frequent witnesses to "the pomp and circumstance of glorious war." Remaining with his patron till the age of twenty-one, he then commenced the practice of medicine in Reading, where, in 1774, he married the beautiful Miss Lucy Smith. Their children were Lucy, who was born June 16, 1775; Alexander Scammell, born Oct. 19, 1781; and John, born May 20, 1783. Lucy married Rev. John Okill Stuart, of Kingston, C. W., Oct. 2, 1803, and died in 1813, leaving one child, George Okill Stuart, who is the oldest surviving descendant of Gov. Brooks, and who is a counseller at law of high standing; and has been mayor of Quebec. Alexander married Miss Sarah Turner, of Boston, May 28th, 1817. Their children were John and Lucy.

Their daughter Lucy married Hon. Edward L. Keyes, May 30th, 1843. Their children were Caroline Florence, born March 23, 1844; Alexander S. Brooks, born July 28, 1846, and George Stuart, his twin; Edward Livingston, born Sept. 26, 1848. Edw. L. Keyes died June 6th, 1859, aged 47.

John Brooks never married. For manly beauty and grace he had no rival. He commenced the study of medicine under his father's

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direction ; but a commission in the navy drew him into the United States service, where he distinguished himself; and as a Lieutenant stood at the side of Commodore O. H. Perry, in the decisive battle on Lake Erie, Sept. 10th, 1813. A cannon ball severed one leg from his body at the hip, and he died after two hours.

Commodore Perry wrote to his father thus :—"Lake Erie, Sept^r. 12, 1813. Sir, It is with heart-felt pain I am under the necessity of communicating to you the irreparable loss which you and our country have sustained in the death of your gallant and worthy son, Lieut. John Brooks. He fell in the action with the English Squadron at the head of Lake Erie, on the 10th inst., while nobly animating his men to their duty. I sympathize with you most sincerely, and am, with high respect, Your Obd. Servt. O. H. Perry."

The 19th of April, 1775, sounded a nation's summons to the patriotic and the brave. The young physician of Reading heard it, and sprang from his bed before daylight, and was soon leading his company of "minute-men" towards Concord, where he first saw the enemy. Perceiving they had to pass a bridge and causeway, and must call in their flank guards, he took a position behind a wall and fired on them with effect as they passed the narrow defile. He pursued them to Charlestown Neck, killing several; but shielded his men so judiciously as to lose none. He was very busy with Col. Prescott through the night of the 16th of June ; and was selected by him to go to Cambridge and explain to Gen. Ward the reasons for sending reinforcements to Bunker Hill. He was obliged to walk. The historian says : —"His conduct entitled him to great credit in the arrangements of the memorable 17th of June." His skill in the combinations of military manœuvres had the ease of a natural gift. He dedicated his whole soul to his country ; and so efficient were his labors that on the first of January, 1776, he received the following from Congress :—"We, reposing special trust in your patriotism, valor, conduct and fidelity, do, by these presents, constitute and appoint you to be Major of the 19th regiment of foot, commanded by Col. Charles Webb. By order of Congress. John Hancock, Pres."

He was promoted to the rank of Lieut. Colonel in 1777. He took the post of danger in the battle of Saratoga, Oct. 7, 1777. The historian says :—"On the left of Arnold's detachment, Jackson's regiment of Massachusetts, then led by Lieut. Col. Brooks, was still more successful. It turned the right of the encampment, and carried by storm the works occupied by the German reserve. Lieut. Brayman was killed ; and Brooks maintained the ground he had gained. This advantage of the Americans was decisive."

Another historian, member of the army, says :—"The capture of Gen. Burgoyne and his army may be attributed in no small degree to the gallant conduct of Col. Brooks and his regiment, on the 7th of October, in the battle of Saratoga."

In 1819 the Hon. Roger Wolcott Williams, of Connecticut, gave me a minute account of Col. Brooks's skill and bravery on that occasion. I will only mention the central fact. "When the Col. saw that the decisive moment had come, he lifted his sword in the air and cried, 'Follow your Col. at double quick.' He immediately led the way to the top of the entrenchments, crying, *come on, come on.* They did come on ; and the most violent and bloody conflict ensued, in which

they decided the fate of the day." There were 5,752 prisoners taken.

It it not necessary to repeat the history of his labors and skill at Dorchester Heights, Long Island, White Plains and other places. The historian says:—"There were scarcely any important services performed in the northern and central operations of the army in which he did not act a conspicuous part."

One quotation from an eye-witness will more than justify all I have stated. He says: "The confidence which Washington reposed in Col. Brooks, was shown on many occasions; and particularly in calling him to his councils in that terrible moment, when at Newburgh, in March, 1783, a conspiracy of some of the officers had well nigh disgraced the army and ruined the country. On this occasion the commander-in-chief, *to whom this was the most anxious moment of his life*, rode up to Col. Brooks with the intent to ascertain how the officers stood affected. Finding him, as he expected, to be sound, he requested him to keep his officers within quarters, to prevent them from attending the insurgent meeting. Brooks replied—'Sir, I have anticipated your wishes, and my orders are given.' Washington, with tears in his eyes, took him by the hand and said,—COLONEL BROOKS, THIS IS JUST WHAT I EXPECTED FROM YOU."

In private papers, left by Gov. Brooks, there is evidence of his early conviction that Armstrong was the author of the anonymous insurrectionary letter of Newburgh.

The high estimate made by Gen. Washington of Col. Brooks's talents and character, is shown in an unpublished letter, dated—"Head Quarters, 24th March, 1778." A few extracts are as follows:—"With a view of establishing uniformity of discipline and manœuvres in the army, it is in agitation to form an inspectorship distributed among different officers. The Baron Steuben, a gentleman of high military rank, profound knowledge and great experience in his profession, is placed at the head of this department. . . . . As the office of Sub-inspector cannot be filled with propriety but by men whose character and abilities will give them influence and ensure their success, I would make choice of gentlemen who unite those advantages; and in my own mind have fixed on you as one. . . . . There will be an additional share of duty incident to the office, which will probably be considered in determining the emoluments; but will more especially be compensated by the honor and respectability attached to it.

"If you choose to accept the appointment, you will be pleased to acquaint me immediately with your intentions, that I may have you relieved. The time for action advances with hasty strides; we should therefore improve every minute; and the sooner you enter on the function of Sub-inspector the more likely will you be to reap the satisfaction of doing essential service to the army.

I am, Sir, your most obedient servant,

G. WASHINGTON."

He accepted the office, and performed its duties so thoroughly as to be several times referred to, by Gen. Washington, as an example. He tempered an iron decision with a gentlemanly mildness as very few men can. His uniform and efficient love of his men, caring for them and doing for them as if each was a brother, won the hearts of his soldiers.

Gen. Lafayette's letters to Gov. Brooks are full of expressions of fraternal regard. One short extract will suffice as an example.

"New York, Sept. 20, 1824.

My dear Friend, —— Col. Huger, my noble deliverer from the Olmutz prison, whose enterprise and sufferings you well know, is going to Boston. I am sure you will be glad to see him; and I take this opportunity to let you hear from me. . . . . Receive, my dear Friend, the affectionate and grateful wishes of your old brother soldier. Remember me to family and friends; and believe me forever most tenderly attached to you. LAFAYETTE."

The following record shows that the Major General of the Massachusetts militia was needed at Cambridge:

"At a meeting of the President and Fellows of Harvard University, July 14, 1786, Voted,—That John Brooks, Esq. be requested to give his attendance at the University on Commencement day and night, and the day and night following, to assist in preserving peace and good order during that season. JOSEPH WILLARD, President."

After the conclusion of the war, Col. Brooks was invited by Dr. Tufts to take his place as the physician of Medford; and this was a very popular arrangement. He accepted; and on the 18th of October, 1786, was elected a fellow of the Massachusetts Medical Society; of which Society he was a counsellor in 1803; and before which he delivered, in 1808, the annual address, on Pneumonia. He was chosen President of the Society after he had left the chair of State, and kindly remembered it in his will. Dr. Dixwell says: "As a physician he ranked in the first class of practitioners. He possessed in an eminent degree those qualities which were calculated to render him the most useful in his professional labors, and the delight of those to whom he administered relief. His manners were dignified, courteous and benign. He was sympathetic, patient and attentive. His mind was well furnished with scientific and practical knowledge."

One so distinguished for sound judgment, lofty principle and patient labor could not be spared from the public service. Washington and Adams both selected him for public trusts. Sept. 12, 1791, he was appointed, by Jefferson, Marshal of the district of Massachusetts; and Nov. 6, 1795, this commission was renewed. Dec. 22d, 1796, he received the appointment of "Inspector of the revenue for Survey No. 2, in the district of Massachusetts."

Of military titles he had many: that of Major in 1776; that of Brevet Colonel in 1787; that of Major General in the Massachusetts third division in 1786; that of Brigadier General in the United States Army in 1792.

The following records belong to the biography of General Brooks. "Monday, March 31, 1800. The following written message was received from the President of the United States, by Mr. Shaw, his Secretary:—

"Gentlemen of the Senate. I nominate John Brooks, of Massachusetts, to be a Major General in the army, in place of Henry Knox, who has declined the appointment. JOHN ADAMS."

"The message was read.—Ordered that it be laid over for consideration."

"April 1st, 1800. The message nominating John Brooks as Major General was considered, and the further consideration postponed."

I have carefully sought the reasons alleged for this decision; but

have found none. Seeing President John Adams very often during the last years of his life, I well remember how cordially and fully he approved of the character and conduct of Gen. Brooks. I think the action of the Senate was based on the idea, that New England had already too many Major Generals.

Dr. Dixwell says :—" Almost every institution of a literary, religious, patriotic, benevolent or professional character seemed to vie with each other in conferring their highest honors on him." The honorary degree of A.M. was conferred on him by Yale College in 1781 ; by Harvard College in 1787. In 1810 Harvard College conferred on him the degree of M.D. ; and in 1817 its highest degree, LL.D. He was selected to deliver the first oration before the Cincinnati, July 4th, 1787 ; and after the death of Gen. Lincoln, the first President, was chosen his successor. He was a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences ; President of the Bunker Hill Monument Association ; and President of the Massachusetts Bible Society. From the office of Justice of the Peace, which he received from Gov. Hancock, Jan. 28, 1785, to his resignation of the gubernatorial chair, he was never in want of civic honors. He was elected deacon of the first church in Medford ; but declined only on account of his age.

In the short notice of Governor Brooks here inserted, it is not proposed to speak of his whole life or labors. His domestic character was as beautiful a specimen of nobility and love as was ever shown. While Governer I saw him go into our kitchen, sit down before the fire and make some wine-whey for his sick cousin. He would allow no one to help him.

He was not accustomed to select the defects or faults of others as topics of conversation. He loved to dwell on the character of Washington and his fellow officers of the army. I once asked him to sketch the character of Major Gen. Lincoln. He sent me the following :—

" I was more acquainted with Gen. Lincoln as a man than as a soldier. His manners were dignified, but plain, and wholly free from ostentation. As a man he was remarkable for cool deliberation ; for great good sense and sound judgment ; for inflexible integrity and a straight forward course of action. He thought much, and had his opinions, but they were his own. He was no bigot in religion, nor enthusiast in politics. He had the faculty of communicating his views distinctly, and of bringing others to a coincidence of opinion with himself, yet was no dogmatist. His suavity arose from an unaffected ease and simplicity of manner, and from the artless power he possessed of impressing on other minds the fulness of his own convictions. With great benignity of disposition he was steady in executing his purposes : hence, though he often disappointed others, he seldom offended them. He was judiciously communicative ; but never garrulous. Nature denied him fluency, and a consciousness of it might have induced a degree of occasional reserve, which in some men would have passed for pride. When most retired and taciturn, he would appear cheerful and be pleased with the converse and humor of others ; and never indicated anything like haughtiness or austerity. Though plethoric and inclined to obesity, Gen. Lincoln could endure (especially before he received his wound, in October, 1777), great exercise and fatigue : and being no epicure, could sustain himself as long and as patiently as any one on the humblest fare of a common soldier." The letter was never finished.

Another unpublished letter of Gov. Brooks refers to the complaints connected with the burial of the English Gen. Frazer; and is as follows:—

"Dear Sir, "*Medford, Nov.* 9, 1820.

I thank you for sending me Prof. Silliman's 'Short Tour from Hartford to Quebec;' and it gives me great pleasure to see that you take so lively an interest in the reputation of our country as connected with the temper and conduct of the army of the American Revolution. As I was not present with the 'advance corps' of the army, under the immediate command of Gen. Lincoln, on the 8th of October, 1777, I could have no knowledge of the circumstances to which your letter relates. The official communications of Gen. Burgoyne to his government, dated immediately after his surrender, but not published in America until many months afterwards, gave me the first information that our cannon had annoyed the British army while performing the rites of sepulchre at the interment of Gen. Frazer. It was long after this that I heard the explanation given to the cannonade, which you mention as having been received by you from our late worthy friend Major Gen. Winslow. But, whether he ever gave that explanation to me or not, I would not now venture to affirm. Gen. Burgoyne, you are sensible, was garrulous and sometimes eloquent; but, as his inflated, fulminating and sanguinary proclamations did not deter the American army of freemen from meeting his bayonets, so neither did the plaintive and dolorous description of the interment of Gen. Frazer, after a signal defeat, in a moment of dismay and retreat, and during a cannonade from our batteries, make any impression on my judgment as to the nature of that transaction; and I confess that I feel perfectly willing that the account, as stated by Gen. Burgoyne himself, should go down to posterity, if the future historians of his nation should think fit to perpetuate the whining plaints of an ostentatious, misjudging and luckless chief. I presume that no impartial military man has imagined, or ever will imagine, the conduct of the American army, in the instance in question, as violating the laws of war or humanity. The accomplished wife of Gen. Reidezel, and several other excellent women, whom Gen. Burgoyne had no doubt induced to become followers in his train under the delusive hope of being sharers in the benefits of his conquests, were among the hapless witnesses of the scene. It would have evinced the good sense as well as the gallantry of the courtly chief, had he resigned the execution of that episode in his tragic story to the fair companions of his fate.

"Gen. Burgoyne was a courtier; and his talents were better fitted to the Court of St. James than to the theatre of American warfare. He had ambition, but it was a selfish one. He had no pretensions to magnanimity. He held the Americans and their cause in contempt. I recollect no indication of humane sentiment from the commencement of his career to his final overthrow and disgrace."

Among military men swords are often the brightest records of their character and success. In Gov. Brooks's family are several commemorative swords. One called the "straight gilt scabbard sword," has the following engraved inscription:—

"To His Excellency John Brooks, Commander in Chief of the

Militia of Massachusetts, and twice Commander of the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company, this Sword is most respectfully presented by that Ancient Corps, in full confidence that it will be wielded with glory and success in War, and be preserved untarnished in Peace."

On the other side was the following:

"Presented on the field in Boston, June 2d, 1817; and on the 180th anniversary of the Institution."

The sword, worn by Col. Brooks in the battle at Saratoga, Oct. 7th, 1777, has been presented by A. L. Rawson, Esq., to the "Mass. Historical Society." It is called "The sword of Saratoga." The sword carried by Col. Alexander S. Brooks through the war of 1812–14, is preserved. The one he wore, at the time of his death, was captured by his father from a Hessian officer in one of the battles of the revolution.

Another sword belonging to Col. Alex. S. Brooks was given to his son George, by his mother. He was Lieutenant in the 2d Mass. Heavy Artillery in 1862, at Newbern, N. C.

John, the son of Gov. Brooks, had a long curved sabre presented to him by Lafayette in Paris. It had a rich sash attached to it. This sabre and sash were on his person when killed in the naval battle on Lake Erie.

These sword memorials are preserved as historical data, and as testimonies of rank and character.

Passed Midshipman John Brooks, son of Col. Alexander S. Brooks, died in Boston, June 4th, 1843. He was a devoted and tender son; an affectionate brother and a gallant officer.

The last years of Gov. Brooks were passed in the midst of loving neighbors and friends. His last illness was a short one. He was aware of his approaching end, and said to Mrs. Jonathan Brooks, his nearest relative in Medford, "I have received orders and am ready to march." He was indeed ready; for the lamp of religion was within him trimmed and burning, and he was waiting for the coming of his Lord.

The granite pyramid, that stands in the old burying ground, has the following inscription:—

"Sacred to the memory of John Brooks, who was born in Medford, in the month of May, 1752, and educated at the town school. He took up arms for his country on the 19th of April, 1775. He commanded the regiment which first entered the enemy's lines at Saratoga; and served with honor to the end of the war. He was appointed Marshal of the District of Massachusetts by President Washington, and after filling several important civil and military offices, he was, in the year 1816, chosen Governor of the Commonwealth, and discharged the duties of that station for seven successive years to general acceptance. He was a kind and skilful physician; a brave and prudent officer; a wise, firm and impartial magistrate; a true patriot, a good citizen and a faithful friend. In his manners he was a gentleman; in morals, pure; and in profession and practice, a consistent Christian. He departed this life in peace on the 1st of March, 1825, aged seventy-three. This monument to his honored memory was erected by several of his fellow citizens and friends, in the year 1838."

Gaylord Bros.
Makers
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